

April 4, 2011

**To:** Interested Parties  
**From:** Ben Tulchin and Ben Krompak, Tulchin Research  
**Re:** **Costa Mesa (CA) Voters Strongly Reject City Outsourcing Plan**

In the newest battleground in the fight between right-wing politicians and public employees, **a recent survey of likely voters in Costa Mesa, CA finds city residents strongly opposed to a plan by the City Council to outsource city services and lay off nearly half of the city's workforce.** Fundamentally, voters are satisfied with the current quality of city services, believe this is a misguided attempt to balance the budget, and are even less likely to support the plan when they learn more about the magnitude of the lay-offs and that city government has no plan to cut wages for its highest paid bureaucrats.

**Strong Opposition to City Council Plan.** When we asked voters their initial reaction to the City Council's proposal, we found that **a solid majority rejects the plan.** Specifically, the City Council's plan is opposed by nearly three out of five voters (59% of likely voters), including nearly half of all likely voters who *strongly* oppose the proposal (44%). In contrast, barely a third of voters (34%) support the proposal and there is little intensity behind this support as less than one in five voters (19%) *strongly* supports it, less than half the number of voters who are strongly opposed. Few voters – only eight percent – are undecided on this unpopular proposal.

| <b>Costa Mesa City Council Outsourcing Plan</b>   |            |
|---|------------|
| <i>"As you may have heard, the City Council is planning to balance the city budget by outsourcing 18 services currently provided by the city to private contractors and laying-off 213 city employees, or nearly half of the city's current workforce. Based on this, would you say you support or oppose the City Council's plan to balance the budget?"</i> |            |
| <b>Total Support</b>  | <b>34%</b> |
| Strongly Support  | 19%        |
| Somewhat Support  | 15%        |
| <b>Total Oppose</b>   | <b>59%</b> |
| <b>Strongly Oppose</b>  | <b>44%</b> |
| Somewhat Oppose   | 15%        |
| Undecided   | 8%         |

*\*The total may not add up to 100% due to rounding.*

**Opposition to the Plan from Across the Ideological Spectrum.** This strong opposition is particularly impressive given that the city is very conservative. The proposal's deep unpopularity is due to the fact that it draws opposition from across the ideological spectrum.

Notably:

- Conservative voters are, surprisingly, evenly divided on this issue, with 43% opposed and 46% in support – a statistical tie, as that difference falls within the survey’s margin of error. Conservatives are the most unsure of any ideological group as 11% are currently undecided, twice as many as liberals and moderates;
- Moderates oppose the plan by a greater than 2-to-1 margin, as 66% are opposed and only 29% are in support;
- Liberals lead the way in opposing the plan with 79% rejecting the plan and only 14% supporting it.

| <b>Costa Mesa City Council – Outsourcing Plan by Ideology</b>   |                   |                      |                  |                 |
|---|-------------------|----------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| <i>“As you may have heard, the City Council is planning to balance the city budget by outsourcing 18 services currently provided by the city to private contractors and laying-off 213 city employees, or nearly half of the city’s current workforce. Based on this, would you say you support or oppose the City Council’s plan to balance the budget?”</i> |                   |                      |                  |                 |
|   | <b>All Voters</b> | <b>Conservatives</b> | <b>Moderates</b> | <b>Liberals</b> |
| Support   | 34%               | 46%                  | 29%              | 14%             |
| <b>Oppose</b>   | <b>59%</b>        | <b>43%</b>           | <b>66%</b>       | <b>79%</b>      |
| Undecided   | 8%                | 11%                  | 5%               | 7%              |

*\*The total may not add up to 100% due to rounding.*

**Voters Satisfied with Current Level of City Services.** One factor driving the broad opposition to the City Council’s outsourcing plan is the fundamental fact that Cost Mesa residents are generally satisfied with the current quality of services provided by city government. More than eight in ten voters (81%) rate the quality of city services as “good” (59%) or excellent (22%), compared to just 17% who feel services are “only fair” (14%) or “poor” (3%).

| <b>Costa Mesa Voters Are Satisfied With Current Quality Of City Services</b>   |            |
|--|------------|
| <i>“How would you rate the quality of city services that Costa Mesa provides: excellent, pretty good, only fair, or poor?”</i> |            |
| <b>Excellent</b>   | <b>22%</b> |
| <b>Good</b>  | <b>59%</b> |
| Only Fair  | 14%        |
| Poor   | 3%         |
| Don’t Know/No Answer   | 1%         |

**The More Voters Learn About the Proposal, The Less They Like.** While a strong majority of voters currently opposes the City Council plan overall, even more dislike specific components of the proposal.

- After learning that Council’s budget plan “lays off nearly half of all city employees,” more than two-thirds of the Costa Mesa electorate (68%) says that they are *less likely* to support the plan, including 57% of conservatives, 70% of moderates, and 92% of liberals.
- Upon hearing that the city’s plan does not involve “cutting the pay of its seven highest paid bureaucrats to balance the budget, even though combined they make \$1.6 million in salary and benefits,” four out of five voters (79%) say they are *less likely* to support the Council’s budget plan. Public opinion extends across ideological lines even more so on this aspect of the plan, with 76% of conservatives saying the absence of executive pay cuts makes them less likely to support the plan along with 82% of moderates and 89% of liberals.

| <b>Costa Mesa Voters Dislike Specific Components of the Plan Even More</b>  |                    |                    |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|
| <i>“For each possible impact, please tell me whether you would be more or less likely to support the plan.”</i>   |                    |                    |
|   | <b>MORE LIKELY</b> | <b>LESS LIKELY</b> |
| <i>Lays offs nearly half of all city employees.</i>   | 22%                | <b>68%</b>         |
| <i>The city did not propose cutting the pay of its 7 highest paid bureaucrats to balance the budget, even though combined they make 1.6 million dollars in salary and benefits.</i> | 12%                | <b>79%</b>         |

In conclusion, this poll clearly demonstrates that Costa Mesa voters are solidly opposed to the City Council’s approach to balancing the budget and object strongly to the proposed lay-offs of nearly half the city workforce and to outsourcing most city services. This opposition transcends ideological lines and should serve as guidance to the city’s elected officials that their actions defy the will of Costa Mesa voters.

**Survey Methodology:** From March 24 – March 27, 2011, Tulchin Research conducted a citywide telephone survey in Costa Mesa among 400 likely voters. Interviews were conducted by live professional callers and the sample included both landline and cell phone numbers. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 4.87 percentage points.